



## CHAPTER 5

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# The Construction of Early Social Citizenship: The Lived Institution of Poor Relief in Mid-Nineteenth-Century Finland

*Heikki Kokko*

### INTRODUCTION

The Gracious Act, given on March 22, 1852 [...] ordained that every parish had to take care of its own poor people and thus made this poor relief legal.<sup>1</sup>

In 1856, when four years had passed since the enactment of the poor relief reform, the historian Georg Zacharias Forsman described its significance in the above-mentioned way. By “legal” poor relief, Forsman referred to two novel aspects of the reform. First, it was the first socio-political effort to create a comprehensive subsistence system with a harmonized set of

<sup>1</sup>Forsman, Vaivaisuus ja vaivaiholho. *Suometar*, 13 March 1857 no 11.

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© The Author(s) 2024  
J. Annola et al. (eds.), *Lived Institutions as History of Experience*,  
Palgrave Studies in the History of Experience,  
[https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-38956-6\\_5](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-38956-6_5)

norms.<sup>2</sup> Second, the Act recognized poverty as a societal problem that was to be remedied by legislation. Forsman, who later became a professor of history and the leader of the nationalist movement in Finland, was not alone in his conceptualization that emphasized the revolutionary idea of the Poor Relief Act of 1852. The experience that the Act legalized poverty in Finland was often repeated in the contemporary public debate at the end of the 1850s.<sup>3</sup>

In Finnish historiography, the Poor Relief Act of 1852 has not been seen as a major milestone in welfare state development. The Act has been mainly analyzed by comparing it with earlier legislation and the Poor Relief Act of 1879. The latter Act has been regarded as harsher toward poverty but more liberal regarding individual rights, thus paving the way for modern citizenship in Finland.<sup>4</sup> Interpretations of the 1852 Act, in turn, are more contradictory. While some scholars have seen the Act as a philanthropic reform that diminished the stigma of poor relief,<sup>5</sup> others have emphasized its patriarchal character, stressing the fact that the Act was passed together with the Act on Forced Labor and Vagrancy, which heavily restricted the individual freedom of mobility. The two acts of 1852 (henceforth referred to as “poor relief reform” or “poor relief legislation”) were introduced to prevent beggary and the unrest that had been experienced elsewhere in Europe since the revolutions of 1848.<sup>6</sup>

The view changes if the top-down perspective is replaced by a from-below approach. Due to new digital research material, it is possible to move the focus from legislation to the everyday experience of the poor relief reform. I will assess the significance of the poor relief reform by looking at the societally shared experiences of the people who lived through it, as well as at the social structures of the era—the very elements that constructed the social institutions of the time. In other words, my interpretations are not based on the future chronology of poor relief and welfare

<sup>2</sup> Aerschot, *Köyhät ja laki*, 77.

<sup>3</sup> O. B. [Oskar Blomstedt], Vaivaisholhosta Ilmajoella m. m. *Suometar*, 5 May 1857 no 17; S. P. S. Talonpoika, Ylikannukselta. *Suomen Julkisia Sanomia*, 11 May 1857 no 36.

<sup>4</sup> Jaakkola, Sosiaalisen kysymyksen yhteiskunta, 110–13.

<sup>5</sup> Piirainen, *Kylänkierrolta kunnalliskotiin*, 80–1; Haatanen, *Suomen maalaisköyhälistö*, 61.

<sup>6</sup> Pulma, Vaivaisten valtakunta, 59–61; Pulma, Köyhästäkö kansalainen?, 165–7. According to Markkola, it preserved the chief maintenance of the poor people as the responsibility of the family, which included the servants. Markkola, *Työläiskodin synty*, 25; Markkola, *Changing Patterns of Welfare*, 229; ALS 1852.

state development but are instead guided by the moment of experience. This is the basic schema of the social history of experiences.<sup>7</sup>

In this chapter, I ask what kind of citizenship was constructed in the wake of the poor relief reform of 1852. In a wider sense, I use Finland as a case study to examine how early social citizenship was formulated in the interplay between the local, societal, and transnational. While the classic approach to citizenship focused on a formal status as defined by legislation,<sup>8</sup> more recent scholarship has extended the definition of citizenship to social practices, stressing the role of informal citizenship or lived citizenship.<sup>9</sup> The novel concept of *lived social citizenship*, which focuses on from-below everyday experiences, allows for an analysis of the early local practices of citizenship. As a historical layer, early lived citizenship may have influenced later social citizenship in the welfare state.<sup>10</sup>

At the heart of my chapter lies the understanding that the implementation of the poor relief reform coincided with the first rise of the Finnish nationwide public sphere. Public discussion on legislation was limited because the country's legislative body, the Diet of the Four Estates, did not convene between 1809 and 1863, and the Finnish-language press was under strict censorship until the period that followed the Crimean war.<sup>11</sup> However, the nationwide culture of readers' letters to newspapers that developed during this first rise of the Finnish press from the 1850s onward makes the analysis possible.

The letters were usually written in the name of local communities. In their local letters to the newspapers, hundreds of ordinary people documented their experiences of the societal change that occurred in the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>12</sup> The culture of the letters to newspapers was truly nationwide, because the early Finnish-language press was not local or regional but nationwide in its character. Because of the societal circumstances, the vast majority of the newspaper issues were delivered to the rural areas by the mail service.<sup>13</sup> These local letters were not usually

<sup>7</sup>I have developed this methodological-theoretical approach with Minna Harjula. See Kokko and Harjula, *Social History of Experiences*; Harjula and Kokko, *The Scene of Experience*; Kokko, *Temporalization of Experiencing*; Harjula, *Eletty hyvinvointivaltio*; Harjula, *Framing the Client's Agency*; Minna Harjula's chapter, *Encountering Benefits for Families*, in this book. See also Kettunen, *The Nordic Welfare State*, 226–7.

<sup>8</sup>See Marshall, *Citizenship and Social Class*, 1–85.

<sup>9</sup>Lister, *Engendering Citizenship, Work and Care*, 11–2.

<sup>10</sup>Kallio, Wood, and Häkli. *Lived Citizenship*, 713–29; Lister et al., *Gendering Citizenship*; Harjula's chapter.

<sup>11</sup>Tommila, *Yhdestä lehdestä sanomalehdistöksi 1809–1859*, 167–71, 175–8.

<sup>12</sup>Kokko, *From Local to Translocal Experience*, 181–3.

<sup>13</sup>Kokko, *Suomenkielisen julkisuuden nousu 1850-luvulla*, 11–12, 16–19.

censored, because they often reported only local issues. Thus, these letters express experiences of the local implementation of the poor relief reform. This material has not been systematically used in the earlier research considering the reform of 1852.<sup>14</sup>

As historical evidence, the letters have social representativeness because public writing in the name of the community exposed the authors to criticism in their local communities. Other writers from the local community usually corrected any errors of fact that were published in the press. Furthermore, hundreds of writers and thousands of readers across the country cautiously controlled what the other authors wrote. The debates and comments on other authors' letters were a characteristic feature of this culture of letters to the press. As the debates were public and spread nationwide, control by the peer group was societal in character.<sup>15</sup>

In this chapter, I use the Translocalis Database of readers' letters and the general discussion on poor relief in the Finnish-language press in 1853–1860 as my main research material. Furthermore, I use the official material—legislation and statistics—to outline the formal structure and preconditions of citizenship in the era. I will periodize my analysis in two phases: the era of 1853–1856, when the censorship was strict and 1857–1860, when it loosened. I will end my analysis in 1860, when other social issues started to dominate the public debate.<sup>16</sup>

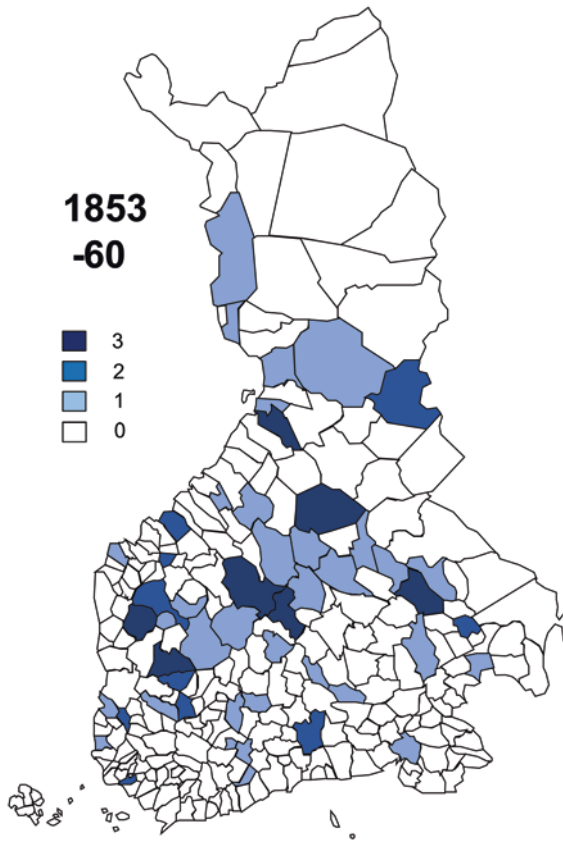
The main argument of this chapter is based on the quantitative analysis of the Translocalis digital database and qualitative analyses of the approximately 5000 local letters dating from 1853 to 1860.<sup>17</sup> The letters were written all across the country (see Fig. 5.1).

<sup>14</sup>I have collected the readers' letters written in the name of local communities into the *Translocalis Database* at the Finnish Academy Centre of Excellence in the History of Experiences (HEX). The database contains all readers' letters written in the name of local communities and published in the Finnish-language press during the period 1850–1885, gathered from the fully digitalized newspaper collection of the National Library of Finland. The database includes some 72,000 letters, which are OCR-recognized. Kokko, Suomenkielisen lehdistön paikalliskirjekulttuuria.

<sup>15</sup>See Kokko, Suomenkielisen lehdistön paikalliskirjekulttuuria.

<sup>16</sup>The debate on January committee started in 1860. It prepared for the legislative assembly, the Diet of Finland that convened in 1863 after a break of over a half a century.

<sup>17</sup>The letters that include information about the poor relief were first filtered with the digital word searches that cover the Finnish words for poor relief. The results were then manually filtered to correct errors in the OCR recognition. In this process, 117 letters from 77 different locations that mention the poor relief in 1853–1860 were found. These letters included 8 variants from other newspapers and 11 anonymous letters. Most of the signed letters are written under pseudonyms. It could be assumed that there are at least 77 different writers. Translocalis Database.



**Fig. 5.1** The circulation of local letters that mention poor relief in 1853–1860

The local letters could be published under a pseudonym or with no signature at all.<sup>18</sup> Generally, the social background of the writers of the letters varied. Although the Lutheran church taught everyone to read to some extent, only a small percentage of the people in the Finnish-speaking countryside could write.<sup>19</sup> Full literacy was rare, and many writers were pastors and civil servants who had received an education. However, among

<sup>18</sup> Kokko, *From Local to Translocal Experience*, 185–7.

<sup>19</sup> See Leino-Kaukiainen, *Suomalaisten kirjalliset tiedot autonomian kaudella*, 422–4.

the writers were many from the lower strata of society—freeholder peasants, crofters, and even workers—who usually can be identified by their style of writing. In general, it seems that many ordinary people who had the rare ability to write contributed to the culture of local letters.<sup>20</sup> It could be assumed that at least some writers were involved in the reform of their own community. Due to the low literacy rate in the countryside, the writers were a special group whose skills were undoubtedly used in the implementation of local reforms. As the poor could seldom write, the general voice in the letters was rather the payer than the receiver of poor relief.

The chapter proceeds as follows. First, I will indicate how the Finnish poor legislation of 1852 defined a new kind of formal “local citizenship,” which extended the basis of the membership of the community from the level of the household to the level of the parish. Second, I will show how this citizenship extended beyond the local level and formed a new kind of nationwide informal lived citizenship. My main argument is that the emerging poor relief institution became the first modern nationwide societal institution that had the potential to reach most of the population in Finland via the reciprocal circulation of knowledge in the establishment of the Finnish-language press. Third, I demonstrate how poor relief became the first social institution that channeled broad-scale public social critique toward the authorities. Altogether, I argue that the poor relief institution in 1850s Finland constructed an early social citizenship that was based on the interaction between the legislation, local experiences of civil society, and transnational circulation of knowledge concerning the rights and responsibilities of the citizen.

### LOCAL CITIZENSHIP

In mid-nineteenth-century Finland, the status of an individual in relation to the state and authorities was defined by the system of the four estates: the nobility, clergy, urban burghers, and freeholder peasants. In this patriarchal system, rural landless people—domestic servants, temporary farm laborers, cottagers, and crofters—lacked political power, as they were represented by landowners in the legislative bodies. In the mid-nineteenth century, rural landowners, their servants, and other groups of landless

<sup>20</sup> Kokko, *From Local to Translocal Experience*, 191–2.

people made up 97 percent of the population,<sup>21</sup> which points to the agrarian economy of Finland, as well as the wide-reaching societal significance of the 1852 poor relief reform.

Rapid population growth increased the number of landless farm laborers and resulted in rural poverty from the eighteenth century onward. As the pre-1852 poor relief system only recognized those poor who were unable to work for their living (the infirm poor), vagrancy and beggary became the only survival strategies for those capable of work (able-bodied) but were unemployed. Even though the mobility of the poor from one parish to another was restricted by legislation, vagrancy became a problem especially in the frequent years of crop failures.<sup>22</sup> The Poor Relief Act of 1852 was passed to remedy this very issue.

With the passing of the new Act, the main responsibility for the maintenance of the poor remained with the family. Only those poor whose parents, grandparents, children, or grandchildren were not able to provide for them were entitled to poor relief.<sup>23</sup> Indeed, the landless were often those who did not have the safety-net of the family because of multi-generational deprivation, which was a growing social problem in the Finnish countryside due to rapid population growth, frequent years of crop failures, and self-subsistent households. Furthermore, social decline to this stratum was not unusual even from the position of a landowner.<sup>24</sup>

However, from the perspective of citizenship studies, it can be argued that the Act constructed a new kind of formal citizenship in Finland with new rights and responsibilities that bypassed the old system of estates. First, the legislation guaranteed basic subsistence against extreme poverty to all inhabitants for the first time in Finland. In addition to the infirm poor, the able-bodied poor in need of temporary aid (and without a provider) were also now entitled to public support.<sup>25</sup> The aid was meant to be given in exchange for work, but in reality there were often no suitable work tasks available. The passing of the Act indicates that the legislators were aware of the fact that there were individuals who were unable to earn

<sup>21</sup> SVT VI 1865, 34–5.

<sup>22</sup> Piirainen, *Kylänkierrolta kunnalliskotiin*; Haatanen, *Suomen maalaishöyhelistö*, 44–7.

<sup>23</sup> VHA 1852.

<sup>24</sup> Frigen, Hemminki, and Nummela, *Experiencing and Encountering Impoverishment*, 8–13, 23; Haatanen, *Suomen maalaishöyhelistö*, 44–53; Haapala, *Maaseudun liikaväestöongelman syntyminen 1800-luvulla*, 297–9.

<sup>25</sup> VHA 1852, §1, §20–23; Pulma, *Vaivaisten valtakunta*, 59–60.

their living despite their ability to work and that society had to take responsibility for them by providing them with work and a basic income.<sup>26</sup>

Second, the Poor Relief Act of 1852 guaranteed a new kind of civil right that protected the individual against the administrative system. While the earlier poor relief legislation had not provided the recipients with a legal right to complain about poor relief, the new Act granted them the right to make a complaint to the governor of the province in question against the local poor relief board.<sup>27</sup> As such, the new Act acknowledged the subjectivity of these disadvantaged societal groups and recognized the human dignity of the individual recipient of poor relief.<sup>28</sup>

Third, the Poor Relief Act of 1852 gave a right to the new stratum of society to participate in the government of the state that was partly disengaged from the Lutheran church administration. Earlier, besides his work as the head of the local church, the pastor directed the rural communities by chairing the parish meetings. The Poor Relief Act of 1852 continued this tradition by placing the pastors as the heads of the local poor relief boards, but a new aspect of the Act was that also freeholder peasants, tenant farmers, and artisans were eligible to be chosen for membership of the board. Furthermore, they could become supervisors of the poor relief districts, which had to be established.<sup>29</sup> Landowners had similar tasks earlier in the church administration, but a novelty was that the specific orders were now given by the central government.<sup>30</sup>

The rights ordained by the Act were balanced by new duties. Participation in the official poor relief administration was not only a right but also a responsibility for the landowners, tenant farmers, and craftsmen. Furthermore, significant for the development of lived citizenship was that every adult person had the responsibility to pay poor relief fees to the parish. This created a rudimentary but coherent system of compulsory local taxation.<sup>31</sup> The poor relief fees recognized the landless people as subjects in a new way. Thus, the system constructed a new kind of relationship between the individual and the society that differed from the old patriarchal system where the human being was defined through his or her status

<sup>26</sup> Piirainen, *Kylänkierrolta kunnalliskotiin*, 80–1.

<sup>27</sup> Pulma, *Vaivaisten valtakunta*, 59–61; Piirainen, *Kylänkierrolta kunnalliskotiin*, 63–7.

<sup>28</sup> Soikkanen, *Kunnallinen itsehallinto kansanvallan perusta*, 79.

<sup>29</sup> Soikkanen, *Kunnallinen itsehallinto kansanvallan perusta*, 78–9, 99–100.

<sup>30</sup> The position of the trust system of the church continued alongside the new system of supervisors, whose orders were given by the central government.

<sup>31</sup> Soikkanen, *Kunnallinen itsehallinto kansanvallan perusta*, 78–9, 99–101.



in the system of estates. This was especially significant because the recognition of each individual as a subject was aimed at disadvantaged people.<sup>32</sup>

However, the intention of the authorities who passed the Poor Relief Act of 1852 was to prevent vagrant beggary, not to construct any kind of modern liberal citizenship. The conservative intention of the legislators becomes clearer when the Act on Forced Labor and Vagrancy of 1852 is examined. It obliged landless people to place themselves under somebody's legal protection, who, in the case of Finland, was usually a freeholder peasant. The Act on Forced Labor and Vagrancy ordered vagrant people who failed to get this kind of legal protection to be reassigned to public workhouses. The intention of the Act was to prevent vagrant beggary by binding poor people spatially to the sphere of locality. This was done by strengthening the old patriarchal order by emphasizing the position of the landowner over the landless people. In the post-1848 world, this was an attempt to prevent agrarian poverty that had the potential to cause societal disorder.<sup>33</sup>

Nevertheless, the implementation of the Act on Forced Labor and Vagrancy was unrealistic and even impossible because there were neither enough places of employment nor public workhouses for the independent landless or vagrant people. Indeed, the Act was widely evaded by registering the landless people, for example, as crofters, mainly because the landowners did not want to give up their temporary labor force. Furthermore, the Act was unpopular among the higher strata of society, because as it restricted freedom of movement, it impaired the industrial development of the country by restricting the labor market. Therefore, the efforts to reform this legislation began shortly after it was enacted.<sup>34</sup> The significance of the Act on Forced Labor tied the poor spatially to the sphere of locality, because although the legal protection did not work properly, the right to move was strictly regulated.<sup>35</sup> As the Act on Forced Labor and Vagrancy's responsibility to obtain patriarchal legal protection became a dead letter, the new rights and responsibilities ordained by the Poor Relief Act became emphasized. This was undoubtedly one reason for the unpopularity of the reform among the propertied classes.

<sup>32</sup>This relates to the breakthrough of the modern subject in Finland. See Kokko, *Kuviteltu minuu*.

<sup>33</sup>Pulma, *Vaivaisten valtakunta*, 59–61.

<sup>34</sup>Haatanen, *Suomen maalaishöyhälistö*, 61, 152; Pulma, *Vaivaisten valtakunta*, 60–1. See, for example, A. B. Jalasjärveltä. *Oulun Viikko-Sanomia*, 18 June 1859 no 24.

<sup>35</sup>Pulma, *Vaivaisten valtakunta*, 59–61.

From the perspective of lived citizenship, the poor relief legislation of 1852 as a whole could be seen as a process that slowly constructed a new kind of formal citizenship in which the rights and responsibilities guaranteed by the state were universal but spatially tied to the sphere of locality. This “local citizenship” concerned especially the lowest strata of society that had no independent status in the system of the estates. However, it had an influence also on the landowners, tenant farmers, and craftsmen, who found themselves with a new position in relation to the central government.

Indeed, the Poor Relief Act of 1852 advanced the formulation of formal “local citizenship” by defining the relationship between the church and state. Earlier, the local administration—the poor relief included—was under the control of the church and, in practice, the parson of the parish. The new opportunity for the applicants of the aid to complain about their treatment to the governor meant bypassing the ecclesiastical local government, which earlier had the decisive power in this issue. This change highlighted in a new way the role of the governor in the local poor relief, which meant that the upper-level control of the administrative organization had a more solid and integrated foundation.<sup>36</sup> Furthermore, the participation of the landowners, tenant farmers, and craftsmen in the administration of poor relief was the first step toward a new municipal administration that was not organized via the Lutheran church. Even though the pastors still acted as the heads of the local poor relief boards, the organization was now more a part of the central government than the old ecclesiastical order. Indeed, the administrative change caused by the Poor Relief Act of 1852 prepared people for the municipal reform (1865) and the Church law (1869), which separated the church from the state in legislation.<sup>37</sup>

The formal “local citizenship” had far-reaching effects in the everyday life of local agrarian communities. It began to construct new kinds of social practices, the informal part of citizenship. The poor relief legislation of 1852 transformed the social dynamics of giving and receiving the aid especially in the case of poor people who were able to work. Earlier, most of such aid was given and received within the household and therefore through face-to-face interaction. The people in need asked for aid personally and the aid was in turn given personally. Now it was the responsibility of every adult person to pay poor relief fees to the parish within a system

<sup>36</sup> Aerschot, *Köyhät ja laki*, 77.

<sup>37</sup> Soikkanen, *Kunnallinen itsehallinto kansanvallen perusta*, 78–81, 99–101.

that was authorized by the state and its legislation.<sup>38</sup> The need for help was estimated by the poor relief supervisor, who now acted with the authorization of the parish and state. A writer of a letter to the press summarized this change from the perspective of a rural landowner in 1854 by writing that the giving of bread and transportation by horse for poor people had changed for the community into paying in money and grain.<sup>39</sup> This undoubtedly strengthened the idea of the parish not only as an ecclesiastical community but also as a lay administrative district. Furthermore, it reinforced the construction of local lived citizenship as local action legitimated by the central administration.

The lived experience of the poor relief reform of the 1850s became visible also at the more general cultural level as new conceptualizations. The early Finnish concept for poor relief used in the Act of 1852 was “vaivaisholhous.” In this compound word, the latter word, “holhous,” referred to being under guardianship. In the Poor Relief Act of 1879, the central concept was “vaivaishoito,” in which the word “hoito” signified care.<sup>40</sup> Simultaneously, the first word of “vaivaishoito” (basic form “vaivainen”) began slowly to be replaced by the concept of “köyhä” in public language when the Poor Relief Act of 1852 was put into practice in the 1850s. As “vaivais” referred originally only to the people who were not capable of work because of their age or sickness, the new concept “köyhä” referred to all poor people, regardless of the cause of the poverty. In the common speech, the new concept of “köyhäinhoito” slowly began to take over from “vaivaishoito” as the dominant concept of poor relief.<sup>41</sup> As Reinhart Koselleck has argued, the change in the concepts of language indicates a change in shared experiences.<sup>42</sup> In this case, the experience of placing the sick, underaged, and old under the guardianship of the household began to be transformed into the experience of poverty as a more general societal problem, the care of which took place within the municipal community.

<sup>38</sup> See Aerschot, *Köyhät ja laki*, 80–2.

<sup>39</sup> S., Nilsistä, *Suometar*, 16 June 1854 no 24.

<sup>40</sup> VHA 1852, VHA 1879.

<sup>41</sup> Based on word searches in the digital collections of the National library of Finland, [digi.kansalliskirjasto.fi](http://digi.kansalliskirjasto.fi). The service includes the Finnish-language press of the era digitized and OCR-recognized. See also Harjula, *Vaivallisuuden vaivatut*, 25–32; Harjula, *Köyhä, keltovoton, kansalainen?*, 7.

<sup>42</sup> See, for example, Koselleck, *Social History and Conceptual History*, 35–7.

## BEYOND LOCALITY

The Poor Relief Act of 1852 provided only a legal framework for the reform and left a lot of room for its implementation to the local communities. This is understandable because of the structural factors of Finnish society. The Russian emperor had been the supreme authority since 1809, and the Grand Duchy of Finland was directed from the top down, as the legislative assembly, the Diet of Finland, was not convened until 1863. This led to the accumulation of power by the central administration and its officials, who carried on the legacy of the earlier Swedish reign. The entire central administration functioned in Swedish, although 85 percent of the population were Finnish-speaking and only 14 percent Swedish-speaking.<sup>43</sup> Swedish, which is linguistically unrelated to Finnish, was the language of the educated classes and a minority of the common people. There were no state schools in Finnish, and Finnish-language literary culture was still thin. The only institution that worked in Finnish was the Lutheran church, which was in charge of local administration in the agrarian parishes and worked as a link between the state administration and the Finnish-speaking majority.<sup>44</sup> As a result of these societal, administrative, and linguistic factors, Finland consisted of numerous different local communities in which the interaction was based mainly on local oral cultures.

The linguistic and educational situation was well visible in the planning and implementation of the Poor Relief Act. When the proposal for the new Poor Relief Act was circulated for comments in the 1840s, only one of the 49 official comments was written by a Finnish-speaking freeholder peasant, even though comments were requested at the parish meetings.<sup>45</sup> According to one of the most active public commentators of the reform, Georg Zacharias Forsman, it was difficult for the freeholder peasants to oversee and investigate the common activities in the parish, as hardly any of them were literate. If a freeholder peasant was chosen for a position of trust in the parish, he would have to employ a scribe for help. As the official documents were written in Swedish, the freeholder peasants got their information only via verbal translations. The poor relief regulation of the parish that was sent to the governor's office for validation was written both in Swedish and Finnish, but only the Swedish text was officially

<sup>43</sup> SVT VI 1865,1.

<sup>44</sup> See Kokko, *Kuviteltu minuus*, 67–74.

<sup>45</sup> Piirainen, *Kylänkierrolta kunnalliskotiin*, 67–81.

confirmed. According to Forsman, the Finnish-speaking freeholder peasants, who since the Act of 1852 were obliged to participate in the implementation of the poor relief, had to trust these oral translations and simply draw their mark under a text written in an unfamiliar language.<sup>46</sup>

However, Finnish society had social dynamics that bubbled under the surface in the mid-nineteenth century. Both the circulation of the Finnish-language press and the number of Finnish-language newspapers and journals increased tenfold between 1850 and 1860, and the press became established as a societal institution during the poor relief reform in the 1850s. The first media that worked in the majority language significantly increased the circulation of knowledge in society. Furthermore, the distinctive culture of local letters to newspapers made this circulation a two-way phenomenon.<sup>47</sup>

The poor relief reform of 1852 was discussed in a lively manner in these local letters. The Translocalis Database includes 27 letters that commented on the poor relief reform in 1853–1856. The 27 letters are signed by 21 different signatories, while four letters are unsigned. The geographical distribution of the letters includes 23 different locations of Finland (see Fig. 5.2). The inland areas are emphasized because these were the areas where the Finnish-language population mainly lived.

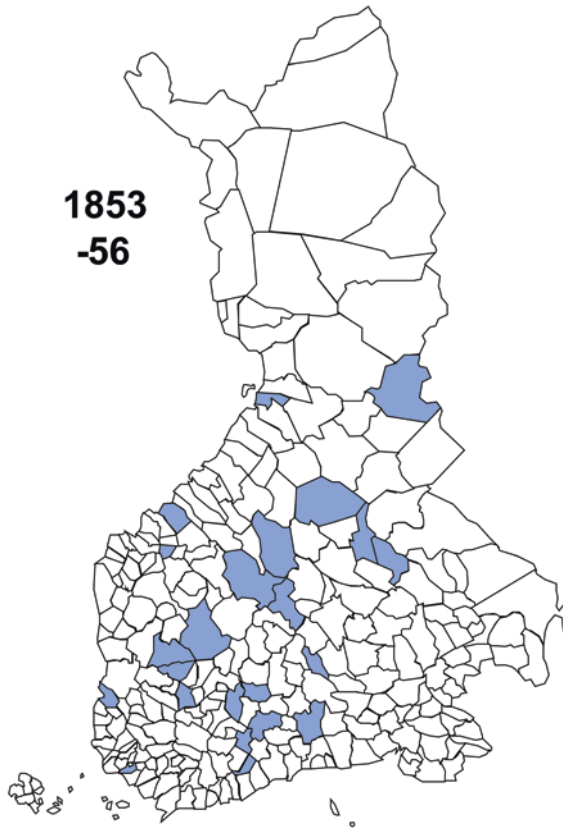
Even though censorship prevented general criticism toward the poor relief reform, a collection of letters commented on the reform from a local point of view. The discussion started in 1853, when Georg Zacharias Forsman, who at that time was a 25-year-old teacher, wrote two local letters from the parish of Hämeenkyrö, where he was visiting. In the first letter, he wondered about the general conservatism of the common people, who had not yet understood the advantage of the new Act.<sup>48</sup> Three months later, he reported that the Poor Relief Board of Hämeenkyrö had done what it could with its limited funds. According to Forsman, the poor relief reform showed that everyone was in need of receiving aid, but no one was in need of giving aid.<sup>49</sup> At the end of the year, an anonymous writer from Ikaalinen, a parish neighboring Hämeenkyrö, wrote how the

<sup>46</sup>Y. K. [Forsman, Georg Zacharias], Hämeenkyröstä. *Suometar*, 6 July 1855 no 27.

<sup>47</sup>Kokko, Suomenkielisen lehdistön nousu 1850-luvulla ja sen yhteiskunnallinen merkitys, 19–21. On Finnish modernization, see Haapala, *Modernisation of Finland 1800–2000*.

<sup>48</sup>Y. K. [Forsman, Georg Zacharias], Hämeenkyröstä. *Suometar*, 15 April 1853 no 15. Georg Zacharias Forsman was the son of Georg Jakob Forsman, the parson of Hämeenkyrö.

<sup>49</sup>Y. K. [Forsman, Georg Zacharias], *Suometar*, 30 July 1853 no 30.



**Fig. 5.2** The circulation of local letters that mention poor relief in 1853–1856

new poor relief had been put into effect in this parish.<sup>50</sup> In the next year, a writer from another neighboring parish and two more writers from Ikaalinen joined the discussion.<sup>51</sup> Interestingly, these first letters all came from the same region of western Finland, indicating a kind of competition between neighboring parishes. The writers constructed their local

<sup>50</sup> Suomalainen Ikaalisista, Ikaalisista. *Suometar*, 23 December 1853 no 51.

<sup>51</sup> M. H-l-n., Kurusta. *Suometar*, 3 March 1854 no 10; S:n J,a., Ikaalisista *Suometar*, 28 April no 17.

identities by presenting how progressive and pioneering the people in their parish were.

The Act of 1852 gave the parishes great liberty to pass their own poor relief regulations. Therefore, many local letters included a detailed description of local practices. In the parish of Alavus, the old system that was based on beggary continued regarding the poor who were able to work. They were licensed to wander from household to household. They were aided with food, and the amount of aid was up to the aid givers.<sup>52</sup> In the parish of Hämeenkyrö, the landlords had to pay an old-age pension to the crofters and tenants, and their wives, who had farmed on the landowner's soil all their life.<sup>53</sup> In Viitasaari, the poor relief regulations ordained two silver roubles to be paid from the poor relief fund to a person who would teach another to read. This cost was then charged to the guardian of the person who had learnt to read.<sup>54</sup> A writer from Padasjoki wrote how the property of a new poor relief recipient was auctioned off as a precondition for receiving aid.<sup>55</sup>

According to ten of the 27 letters, the new Poor Relief Act worked well in its main intention of preventing beggary. Already in 1853, two writers from Ikaalinen wrote that beggary had almost vanished,<sup>56</sup> and even though there were a lot of poor people, they were not wandering around as they were cared for by the parish.<sup>57</sup> Similar experiences were reported by many other writers around the country.<sup>58</sup> Indeed, there were several letters in which the writer expressed deep contentment with the new poor relief. A commentator from Ikaalinen wrote how delightful it was to see poor children being brought up decently and crippled elderly people receiving shelter.<sup>59</sup> A writer from Kiuruvesi bragged how the poor relief in the parish was the best in the province. According to the writer, its blessed fruits would be revealed as time passed.<sup>60</sup> A writer from Tuusula wrote that

<sup>52</sup> K. -k., Alavuudesta. *Suometar*, 7 November 1856 no 45.

<sup>53</sup> Y. K. [Forsman, Georg Zacharias], Hämeenkyröstä. *Suometar*, 6 July 1855 no 27.

<sup>54</sup> K. S., Viitasaaresta. *Suometar*, 16 November 1855 no 46.

<sup>55</sup> Padasjoelta. *Suometar*, 14 December 1855 no 50.

<sup>56</sup> Suomalainen Ikaalisista, Ikaalisista. *Suometar*, 23 December 1853 no 51.

<sup>57</sup> S,n J,a., Ikaalisista. *Suometar*, 28 April 1854 no 17.

<sup>58</sup> Ylihärmästä. *Suometar*, 13 April 1855 no 15; Tuulokselainen, Tuuloksesta. *Suometar*, 25 January 1856 no 4; E. B. [Bisi, Erik], Kiannolta. *Oulun Wiikko-Sanomia*, 13 March 1856 no 29; J. F. G-n., Oulunsalosta. *Oulun Wiikko-Sanomia*, 5 January 1856 no 1.

<sup>59</sup> S,n J,a., Ikaalisista. *Suometar*, 28 April 1854 no 17.

<sup>60</sup> S. P. Kiuruvedeltä. *Suometar*, 25 August 1854 no 34.

everyone in this parish had made their contentment known and expressed no objections.<sup>61</sup>

However, not all letters were positive. There were also descriptions of the contradictions that arose due to the reform. A letter from Kuru told how the landless people in the parish were unhappy because they had to pay extra fees that should have been the responsibility of the freeholder peasants. According to the writer, this was due to the fact that the reform was still in the making.<sup>62</sup> There were several letters concerning general discontent about the high fees of the new poor relief.<sup>63</sup> A writer from Nilsiiä stated how the inhabitants who grumbled about high fees to the poor relief fund did not understand that payment to the community replaced the earlier practice of feeding the needy people in their households.<sup>64</sup> In Laukaa, there was strong resistance when the amount of the poor relief fee was revealed in the parish meeting. According to the writer, the people who made a big fuss about the payments thought that “the Act of the authorities is a lie of the gentry.” According to the writer, the governor had to ordain the poor relief fees of Laukaa, because the parish meeting could not agree on the decision.<sup>65</sup>

Because the implementation of the reform happened simultaneously with the rise of Finnish-language publicity and its culture of local letters, the significance of the discussion about poor relief in 1853–1856 local letters is clear. It made the reciprocal circulation of knowledge about the practical implementation of the reform possible. A larger part of the population than ever before could follow this debate as it received nationwide publicity. The public discussion had the potential for social change, because many readers and writers of the Finnish-language press were people involved in the implementation of the reform in their own local community. Furthermore, via this circulation of knowledge, the standardization of the poor relief institution went further at the societal level. The variety of different practices diminished when knowledge about the most efficient measures spread.

The extent of the societal circulation of knowledge can be estimated statistically. In 1856, about 0.8 percent of the Finnish population over the

<sup>61</sup> P—r., Tuusulasta. *Suometar*, 2 February 1855 no 5.

<sup>62</sup> M. H-ll-n. Kurusta. *Suometar*, 10 March 1854 no 10.

<sup>63</sup> See, for example, S,n J,a., Ikaalisista *Suometar*, 28 April 1854 no 17.

<sup>64</sup> S., Nilsiiästä. *Suometar*, 16 June 1854 no 24.

<sup>65</sup> Laukaasta. *Suometar*, 14 December 1855 no 50.



age of 15 subscribed to newspapers. Readership was, however, a wider phenomenon: There were multiple readers and listeners for each newspaper subscription. It is commonly estimated in the history of the press that each newspaper issue was read by approximately ten people. This means that in 1856, the Finnish-language press reached about 8 percent of the Finnish population over 15 years old. This does not include the listeners; it was usual to read the newspaper aloud, and, of course, there were many people who received second-hand information about what was published in the press.<sup>66</sup> At first glance, these figures seem rather low, but the comparison to the only nationwide mass organizations of the 1890s puts this in context. The total number of members of *Kansanvalistusseura* (the Finnish Lifelong Learning Foundation) and temperance societies reached only 0.6 percent of the whole population in 1892 during the golden age of mass organization.<sup>67</sup> Although these numbers are not fully comparable, it indicates that in 1856, the Finnish-language press already had a remarkable role in the circulation of societal knowledge, at least compared to the earlier times when this kind of information channel was non-existent.<sup>68</sup>

Although the purpose of the 1852 poor relief legislation was to prevent the uncontrolled mobility of the people by emphasizing the role of local communities, the simultaneous rise of the Finnish-language press and its culture of local letters pushed the development in another direction. It created a new kind of public and translocal space in which the poor relief reform was debated and negotiated.<sup>69</sup> In this new sphere, poor relief could become the first nationwide and societal institution that had the potential to reach most of the population in Finland. In this public sphere, the local citizenship defined by the poor relief reform could now extend beyond the boundaries of local communities via the circulation of knowledge and become a “translocal” citizenship. Lived citizenship was still based on membership of the local community, but it was now negotiated in the budding nationwide civil society, which became a noteworthy factor for the first time in the Grand Duchy of Finland.

<sup>66</sup> Circulation data: Tommila, *Suomen lehdistön levikki ennen vuotta 1860*, 328–35; Population data: SVT VI 1865, 12, 25, XI.

<sup>67</sup> Alapuro and Stenius, *Kansanliikkeet loivat kansakunnan*, 50; population data SVT VI:37, 1.

<sup>68</sup> See Kokko, *Suomenkielisen lehdistön nousun yhteiskunnallinen merkitys*, 7–9.

<sup>69</sup> Kokko, *From Local to Translocal Experience*, 193–4.

## TOWARD THE SOCIETAL AND UNIVERSAL LEVEL

The local letters published in the Finnish-language press concerning the poor relief reform increased significantly from 1857 onward. In 1857–1860, there were 90 local letters that mention poor relief in the Finnish-language newspapers. This is more than three times more than the previous four-year period (see Fig. 5.3).

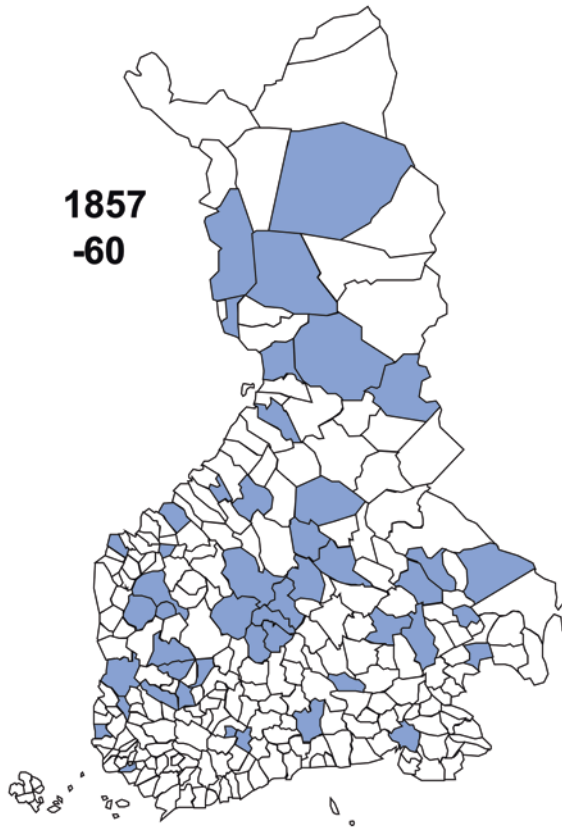
The social atmosphere in Finland changed significantly in 1856 and 1857. The Crimean war (1853–1856) ended with the defeat of Russia, and Emperor Alexander II initiated liberal reforms in Finnish society. As the censorship of the press loosened, newspapers began to publish articles in which the educated elite both praised and criticized the poor relief reform of 1852. The debate, which started in Swedish, spread rapidly to the pages of Finnish-language newspapers.<sup>70</sup> It was especially fueled by the first crop failure since the new poor legislation, in 1857. The hard times meant that a great number of beggars from northern Finland once again wandered south.<sup>71</sup>

Public attitudes toward the poor relief reform changed rapidly in this new atmosphere. Georg Zacharias Forsman, who as recently as in 1855 described the new poor relief in Hämeenkyrö as successful with no vagrant beggars in the parish,<sup>72</sup> published a long article in 1857 titled “Poverty and Poor Relief” in which he argued that poor relief in Finland should be restored to its pre-1852 mode, when its basis was private mercifulness. Forsman argued that official and legal poor relief resulted “in the miserable fruits” of “poverty, shortage, and pauperism” both in Finland and elsewhere in the world. Forsman justified his argument with economics, which for him proved that official poor relief suppressed the poor people’s willingness to plan for the future. Furthermore, for him legalized poor relief was against the principles of Christianity. According to Forsman, Christianity gives no right to the poor people to demand aid, but it tells the wealthy people to give aid, not as the right of the needy people, but for Christ. The aid given by the wealthy people could be seen as aid given to Christ. Ultimately, Forsman leaned in his argument on the right of

<sup>70</sup>X, Några ord om fattigvården. *Borgå Tidning*, 6 December 1856 no 49. *Borgå Tidning*, 13 December 1856 no 50; M. J., Vaivais-hoidosta. *Suomen Julkisia sanomia*, 19 January 1857 no 5.

<sup>71</sup>See Newby, “Acting in Their Appropriate and Wanted Sphere,” 110–11.

<sup>72</sup>Y. K. [Forsman, Georg Zacharias], Hämeenkyröstä. *Suometar*, 6 July 1855 no 27.



**Fig. 5.3** The circulation of local letters that mention poor relief in 1857–1860

ownership. According to him, receipt of poor relief is no one's right so long as there is the right to possess property.<sup>73</sup>

Soon J. W. Murman, the assistant editor of the government's new official newspaper, replied to Forsman with an article titled "Is there reason to abandon the poor relief or improve it?" For Murman, Forsman

<sup>73</sup>Forsman, Georg Zacharias, Vaivaisuus ja vaivaisholho. *Suometar*, 13 March 1857 no 11. *Suometar*, 20 March 1857 no 12. *Suometar*, 27 March 1857 no 13. *Suometar*, 3 April 1857 no. 14.

represented the voice of the wealthy. According to him, legalized poor relief produced poverty only by making visible groups of poor people who had earlier stayed hidden. In Murman's view, the further poor relief was improved, the less poor people were exhausted to deprivation. Murman's argumentation in the poor relief question resembled a Marxist approach. According to him, "the power of wealth is always against the poor people's human dignity," and "the self-interest of the wealthy people has twisted the most advantageous inventions of mankind not for the common profit, but for the profit of individual human beings." Murman referred to factory workers in industrialized countries but also to agrarian workers in Finland. According to him, they were under the power of the wealthy. As the legislation threatened vagrants with workhouses and prisons, indigent people had to bind themselves to the service of a wealthy person for a whole year. For Murman, the poor relief reform protected poor people from the arbitrariness of the wealthy, who according to him had robbed the poor people's participation "in any other human rights except death."<sup>74</sup>

The radical opinions of both Forsman and especially Murman were something that had never been seen before in the Finnish-language press. Indeed, it was a very early socio-political debate in the Finnish-language press, because generally this kind of public discussion did not begin in Finland until the 1870s.<sup>75</sup> The debate is also interesting, because the writings of Forsman are not included in his collected works that have been put together in the twentieth century, when he was promoted as one of the great men of Finnish nationalism.<sup>76</sup> Furthermore, Murman is not a well-known figure of mid-nineteenth-century Finnish history.<sup>77</sup> Thus, this early socio-political debate has remained mainly unknown in Finnish historiography.

However, the debate between Forsman and Murman had the potential to be influential on the societal level in the 1850s not only because it was published in the pages of the two largest Finnish-language newspapers but also because of the social positions of the discussants. Forsman was already a prominent figure in the Finnish-language press and Murman edited the

<sup>74</sup> J. W. M. [Murman, Johan Vilhelm], Onko syytä vaivaishoidon hylkäämiseen vain parantamiseen? *Suomen Julkisia Sanomia*, 26 March 1857 no 24.

<sup>75</sup> See Jaakkola, Sosiaalisen kysymyksen yhteiskunta, 91–2.

<sup>76</sup> See Yrjö-Koskinen, *Kansallisia ja yhteiskunnallisia kirjoituksia*.

<sup>77</sup> See Kokko, *Kuviteltu minuu*s, 172–88.

official newspaper *Suomen Julkisia Sanomia*. In this position, his published article represented the official voice of the authorities. However, Murman seemed to realize that his writing was too radical, because in the same issue of the newspaper, he published a poem in which he wrote that he would move his pencil to a place where it had more freedom.<sup>78</sup> This was Murman's last contribution to the newspaper, and he resigned immediately after publishing the article.<sup>79</sup> Next, it seems that censorship stepped in, as the public discussion was terminated until 1860.<sup>80</sup> Only the governmental newspaper published a moderate editorial, in which it defended the Act of 1852 but in additionally condemned the laziness of the poor people and their tendency to take advantage of the poor relief system.<sup>81</sup>

However, from the point of view of the authorities, the damage was already done. Even though the debate was presumably silenced, the discussion about the poor relief that challenged the legitimacy of the authorities spread to local letters in 1857. In most letters published in 1857–1860 (63 percent), the writers had a neutral or positive attitude toward poor relief. However, there is a clear difference in the letters of this period in comparison to 1853–1856. An interesting proportion of the letters was now more critical. A total of 37 percent discussed the poor relief with a critical tone. What is significant, most of the critical letters (71 percent) were directed toward the Poor Relief Act of 1852 itself. The remainder (29 percent) were usually critical toward the implementation of the reform in the local community.<sup>82</sup>

The first critical local letters were written by members of the Finnish-language elite. In May of 1857, the assistant editor of the newspaper *Suometar*, Oskar Blomstedt, wrote that people in the parish of Ilmajoki had begun to doubt the benefit and expedience of the legalized poor relief due to the constantly increasing number of beggars even when there was a local surplus of grain. According to Blomstedt, earlier the poor trusted in God, the work of their own hands, and the mercifulness of wealthier people. If they noticed in the autumn that their annual income was low, they started to produce something and tried to sell the product to those wealthier. After the legalized poor relief, poor people remained lazy and

<sup>78</sup> Murman J. W., Kynän muutos. *Suomen Julkisia Sanomia*, 26 March 1857 no 24.

<sup>79</sup> Vastaus. *Suomen Julkisia Sanomia*, 30 March 1857 no 25.

<sup>80</sup> Forsman did not reply until May 1860: Forsman, Georg Zacharias, La'illisesta vaivais-holhosta. *Mehiläinen*, 1 May 1860 no 5.

<sup>81</sup> Vaivaisholhaus. *Suomen Julkisia Sanomia*, 23 April 1857 no 32.

<sup>82</sup> Translocalis Database.

turned to poor relief in order to get help.<sup>83</sup> In June 1857, a well-known representative of the nationalist elite, doctor Wolmar Schildt, complained how poor people were rolling into the town of Jyväskylä. Schildt was afraid that the number of poor people would increase, and the town would be in trouble. According to Schildt, this happened everywhere where poor relief fed lazy people.<sup>84</sup> The next year, the pastor of Liperi, Anders Josef Europaeus, demanded that the legalized poor relief be stopped and no new fees set; voluntary ecclesiastical poor relief had to be established alongside legal poor relief.<sup>85</sup> In 1860, Aron Gustaf Borg, a dean from Kuopio, proposed that a deaconess' institution should be established as a solution to the problems caused by the official poor relief.<sup>86</sup>

The critical opinions of the elite spread to local letters written by the ordinary people. In February 1857, H. Tikkanen and Juhana Väisänen wrote from Kiuruvesi that the hungry poor wretches who wandered in large flocks had stolen food. According to the writers, this movement of the crowds could not be prevented by any kind of legislation.<sup>87</sup> J.J. from Kauhajoki wrote that it would be better to change the poor relief to its former model, because now in addition to paying the fees, people still had to feed the beggars.<sup>88</sup> According to N.J., a writer from Kiukainen, there were hardly any poor people at all prior to the Poor Relief Act. The writer described how the Act had produced poor people.<sup>89</sup> A writer from Ilomantsi claimed the “regulations of the Gracious Poor Relief Act are something that only one in a thousand can understand.”<sup>90</sup> Another writer from Kiuruvesi stated how the members of the poor relief board were accused of abusing the fund. According to the writer, people who blamed the board members did not understand that the fault was with the Poor Relief Act itself.<sup>91</sup> In 1859, S. Hrn from Tohmajärvi wrote that the Act of 1852 had caused beggary and pushed all people into poverty. According to this writer, people complained in the press to catch the attention of the

<sup>83</sup> O. B. [Oskar Blomstedt] Vaivaisholhosta Ilmajoella m. m. *Suometar*, 1 May 1857 no 17.

<sup>84</sup> W. K. [Schildt, Wolmar], Jyväskylän kaupunnista. *Suometar*, 26 June 1857 no 25.

<sup>85</sup> Eur-s. [Europaeus, A. J.] *Suometar*, 5 February 1858 no 5.

<sup>86</sup> A. G. B. [Aron Gusfuf Borg] *Kuopion Hippakunnan Sanomia*, 3 March 1860 no 12. On the Deaconess movement in Finland, see Markkola, *Promoting Faith and Welfare*.

<sup>87</sup> Tikkanen H., and Väisänen Juhani, Kiuruvedeltä. *Suometar*, 2 February 1857 no 9.

<sup>88</sup> J. J., Kauhajoelta. *Suomen Julkisia Sanomia*, 12 March 1857 no 20.

<sup>89</sup> N. J., Kiukaisten kappelista Tammikuussa. *Suometar*, 12 February 1858 no 6.

<sup>90</sup> Wilunen, Ilomatsista. *Suometar*, 8 October 1858 no 40.

<sup>91</sup> Kiuruvedeltä. *Suometar*, 15 October 1858 no 41.

authorities.<sup>92</sup> In the same year, a writer from central Finland stated that the Poor Relief Act should be obeyed only when it is necessary and according to the spirit—not the letter—of the law.<sup>93</sup>

Significantly, in the societal context of nineteenth-century Finland, the critique toward the Poor Relief Act was not only about the evaluation of a single law. In an authoritarian country, a public critique of the legislation implied a public critique of the state and its authorities. The Acts in nineteenth-century Finland were declared in the name of the two strongest authorities that could be imagined: God and the Emperor. The Poor Relief Act of 1852, like every other Act and law, began with the words “We Nicholas the first, from the grace of God, the emperor and despot over Russia, The Grand Duke of Finland.”<sup>94</sup> Furthermore, the Lutheran state religion had taught everyone in obligatory confirmation classes that the power of the authorities was God-given and thus holy. God had placed the sword in the hands of the authorities. This had been imprinted in the mind of every adult by the Lutheran Catechisms, a core part of which was written originally by Martin Luther himself and which everyone had to know to be treated as an adult person before the law and the community.<sup>95</sup> As the power of the authorities was understood as divine, public critique toward the Poor Relief Act challenged an order that was widely conceived to be God-given.

Besides challenging the authorities, it is significant that the press debate between Forsman and Murman connected the poor relief reform of 1852 to the discussion of the universal rights and responsibilities that had been going on in the Western world since the French Revolution. In this way, the debate linked the poor relief reform more directly than ever before to the relationship between the individual and society. Social citizenship, which was originally based on locality, was now defined at the societal level via values that were understood as universal. The poor legislation of the authoritarian state, whose purpose was to prevent beggary and social unrest, had been transformed in civil society into a vehicle that challenged the top-down relationship between the individual and society.

In 1857–1860, public discussion about the poor relief had become an arena in which individuals around the country defined their relationship to

<sup>92</sup> S. Hrn, Tohmajärveltä. *Suometar*, 1 April 1859 no 13.

<sup>93</sup> -t -n, Vaivaishoidosta. *Suometar*, 29 July 1859 no 29.

<sup>94</sup> VHA 1852.

<sup>95</sup> Laine and Laine, *Kirkollinen kansanopetus*, 259, 272–4.

the state and its authorities. This meant that the poor relief had become the first institution that mediated the broad-based social criticism that had grown in the nationwide and population-wide civil society. In this institution, modern social citizenship also began to take shape.

### EARLY CITIZENSHIP OF MODERN SOCIETY

The early contemporary upper-class interpretation of the poor relief reform of 1852 was that it made poverty and poor relief legal. However, from the perspective of lived citizenship, it seems that it rather legalized poor people. My analysis shows that the implementation of the legislation quite accidentally made underprivileged people legal subjects by giving them a new status in society. The unintended outcome resulted because, first, the other side of the reform, the Act on Forced Labor and Vagrancy, was impossible to put into effect. Due to this, the new rights and responsibilities ordained by the Poor Relief Act instead of the patriarchal order of the Act on Forced Labor and Vagrancy became emphasized in local daily practices. Second, it occurred because the first rise of Finnish nationwide civil society in the Finnish-language public sphere allowed a new kind of participation in defining the relation between the individual and society as lived citizenship.

The poor relief legislation of 1852 and the development of the poor relief institution in the 1850s created an early social citizenship in Finland that was societal and nationwide in its character. The Poor Relief Act of 1852 began to construct modern citizenship in Finland in four different ways. First, it gave poor people an official position by admitting that poverty was a social problem in Finland. Second, it created social rights and responsibilities by securing a basic livelihood for poor people against the poor relief fees and work. Third, it gave the basic civic right to appeal to the higher levels of the administration about the decisions of the local poor relief board. Fourth, it offered freeholder peasants, tenants, and craftsmen a new right to participate in the administration of society. These changes in legislation bypassed the centuries-old system of the estates, in which the state administration independent of church was in the hands of the educated civil servants and where the underprivileged people of society had no proper legal status.

The citizenship that the poor legislation constructed could be described as local citizenship, because despite the new rights and responsibilities granted by the Poor Relief Act, the Act on Forced Labor and Vagrancy



heavily restricted the individual freedom of mobility by binding the landless people strictly to their local community. Initially, the citizenship that the poor relief reform constructed was local, but the rise of the Finnish-language press and its culture of local letters extended the experiential basis of this citizenship from local to “translocal” and toward societal in 1853–1856. Via the critique toward the Poor Relief Act from 1857, the poor relief became the first institution that was disengaged in public debate from the order that was understood as God-given, and it was viewed as a human-made social structure. Local citizenship was transformed into societal citizenship via the public debate that connected the poor relief reform to the transnational discussion of the universal rights and responsibilities of the citizen. This early lived social citizenship emerged during the 1850s in the interaction between legislation, budding civil society, local experiences, and the transnational circulation of knowledge.

The early social citizenship based on the poor relief reform of 1852 impacted the development of Finnish society for almost 30 years until it was replaced with the new Poor Relief Act (1879). As a lived institution, the poor relief reform of 1852 was present when the large social reforms—the municipal reform (1865), the primary school reform (1866), and the separation of the church and the state (1863)—changed everyday life and the Great Hunger years (1866–1868) killed 10 percent of the population. Thus, the individual-society relationship that was constructed in the practices and debates of the poor relief formed the basis for the later social citizenship and civil society in Finland. Both the early citizenship and the early civil society of the mid-nineteenth century had not been visible for research until the recent digitalization of the historical press material.

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